

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6615

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 PANAMA 0859

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FOR ARA/PAN - MINISTER BELL

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SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL Q&A'S ON PANAMA: II CONTINUING NEGOTIATIONS

THIS IS MESSAGE NUMBER 2 IN A SERIES OF PROPOSED Q&A'S FOR
CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS ON PANAMA.

1. Q. IN VIEW OF THE RECENT EVENTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA,
INVOLVING SUPPRESSION OF POLITICAL DISSENT, EXILE OF PROMINENT
BUSINESS LEADERS, AND/OR A LEFTWARD TURN IN PANAMANIAN GOVERN-
MENT POLICY, IS IT STILL IN THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES
TO CONTINUE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY?

A. AS WE HAVE EXPLAINED BEFORE, THE UNITED STATES NEEDS
A NEW TREATY RELATING TO THE PANAMA CANAL TO PROTECT ITS OWN
REAL AND IMPORTANT INTERESTS IN THE CANAL AND ON THE ISTHMUS.
WHILE WE RECOGNIZE THE MERIT IN PANAMA'S ARGUMENT THAT JUSTICE
AND EQUITY DEMAND A NEW AND MORE EQUITABLE TREATY RELATIONSHIP,
OUR FUNDAMENTAL REASON FOR NEGOTIATING THIS NEW TREATY IS
THAT OUR OWN INTERESTS REQUIRE US TO DO SO. NOTHING HAS HAPPENED
TO CHANGE THIS UNITED STATES NEED TO OBTAIN A NEW TREATY TO
PROTECT ITS OWN INTERESTS.

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2. Q. SHOULD WE CONTINUE NEGOTIATING WITH A GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS, IN RECENT WEEKS, BOTH OFFENDED BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND VIOLATED ITS OWN CONSTITUTION BY ARRESTING AND EXILING POLITICAL OPPONENTS?

A. IT IS THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO DEPLORE AND TO SEEK TO PREVENT VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS WHEREVER AND WHENEVER THEY OCCUR. THIS IS NO EXCEPTION--WE CONSIDER THAT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT ERRED SERIOUSLY IN THE WAY IT ACTED, AND HAVE TOLD ITS LEADERS SO. HOWEVER, WITHOUT ENTERING AN EXERCISE OF "CAST THE FIRST STONE", IT IS NOT OUR POLICY TO ALLOW OUR DISAPPROVAL OF SUCH ACTIONS TO BE THE SOLE DETERMINANT IN CONSIDERING WHETHER, OR HOW, WE WILL PURSUE RELATIONS WITH ANOTHER STATE TO FURTHER OUR OWN INTERESTS. PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, ANY INTERRUPTION IN THE TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WOULD SET OFF A CHAIN OF EVENTS IN PANAMA THAT WOULD PROBABLY LEAD TO POLITICAL INSTABILITY, AND GREATER VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS WOULD SIMPLY BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE TO OUR PARTICULAR INTERESTS ON THE ISTHMUS AND TO OUR GENERAL INTEREST IN DISCOURAGING SUCH ACTIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. ALSO, WE MUST KEEP THIS SITUATION IN PERSPECTIVE--AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, THE UNITED STATES MUST DEAL WITH MANY GOVERNMENTS, IN MANY COUNTRIES, EVERY DAY WHOSE ACTIONS IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD WE DEPLORE AND CONDEMN, AND WHOSE RECORDS AS TO THE SCOPE AND VIOLENCE OF SUCH ACTIONS ARE FAR WORSE THAN PANAMA'S.

3. Q. ARE WE NOT SHOWING OUR IMPLICIT APPROVAL OF THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT, AND OF ITS RECENT ACTIONS, BY CONTINUING THE NEGOTIATIONS?

A. NO. WE ARE NEGOTIATING IN OUR OWN INTERESTS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA. OUR DOING SO DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE EITHER APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THAT GOVERNMENT--IT IS THERE, IT EXISTS, AND IF WE NEED TO NEGOTIATE A TREATY, AS WE DO, WE NEED TO NEGOTIATE WITH IT.

4. Q. DO THE MOST RECENT EVENTS SIGNIFY A BASIC POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN PANAMA WHICH MAKES IT QUESTIONABLE THAT THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT WILL REMAIN IN POWER LONG ENOUGH TO NEGOTIATE A NEW TREATY, OR WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE THE NEW TREATY ACCEPTABLE TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ITS PEOPLE?

A. PANAMA'S CURRENT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN IN POWER 7 YEARS AND DEMONSTRATES ALL THE RECOGNIZABLE SIGNS OF STABILITY. THE EMBASSY REPORTS NO SIGNS OF MAJOR CIVIL UNREST, OR OF MAJOR POLITICAL DISAFFECTION WHICH MIGHT MANIFEST ITSELF IN A SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO OUST THAT GOVERNMENT. UNQUESTIONABLY, SOME SEGMENTS OF PANAMANIAN SOCIETY ARE UNHAPPY WITH CERTAIN

ASPECTS OF THEIR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES, AND HAVE SHOWN THIS BY THE PROTESTS AGAINST IT IN RECENT WEEKS. HOW ANOTHER GOVERNMENT ACTS TO SATISFY SUCH COMPLAINTS FROM ITS OWN PEOPLE IS A MATTER FOR THAT GOVERNMENT, NOT OURS, TO DECIDE, JUST AS OUR INTERNAL POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE PROPERLY OUR OWN CONCERN AND NO ONE ELSE'S. IN ANY EVENT, WE SEE NO SIGNS THAT THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA IS IN IMMINENT DANGER OF BEING OUSTED FROM POWER.

REGARDING THE ACCEPTABILITY OF A NEW CANAL TREATY, OUR JUDGEMENT IS THAT A TREATY WHICH TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE LEGITIMATE INTERESTS OF BOTH OF OUR COUNTRIES WILL BE BROADLY ACCEPTABLE TO THE PEOPLE OF BOTH, REGARDLESS OF WHAT INDIVIDUALS OR GOVERNMENTS NEGOTIATE THAT TREATY. IT IS NECESSARY TO RECALL THAT DESPITE THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT OVER ITS INTERNAL POLICIES, THE PEOPLE EXILED SHARE WITH ALL OTHER PANAMANIAN THE VIRTUALLY UNIVERSAL PANAMANIAN ASPIRATION FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY AND A MORE EQUITABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES.

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6616

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 PANAMA 0859

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FOR ARA/PAN - MINISTER BELL

5. Q. IS IT NOT LIKELY THAT BY GIVING THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT A NEW CANAL TREATY, WE GIVE IT THE MEANS TO PERPETUATE ITSELF INDEFINITELY IN POWER? WILL THIS NOT FREE IT TO TURN

TO THE LEFT, AND FURTHER AGAINST OUR INTERESTS?

A. NO. THE ASPIRATION FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY IN PANAMA IS SO UNIVERSAL THAT WE EXPECT THAT VIRTUALLY ANY PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT, OF WHATEVER POLITICAL PERSUASION, WOULD PURSUE IT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. WHILE OTHER ISSUES MAY DIVIDE VARIOUS SEGMENTS OF THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE, THIS IS ONE WHICH ALMOST INVARIABLY SERVES TO UNIFY THEM. THUS, THERE IS EVERY POSSIBILITY THAT CONCLUSION OF A NEW CANAL TREATY COULD EVEN HAVE THE REVERSE EFFECT--BY REMOVING THIS ESSENTIAL UNIFYING ISSUE, AND POSSIBLY BRINING DOWN CRITICISM ON THIS GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING MADE CERTAIN COMPROMISES IN THE TREATY.

6. Q. SHOULD WE NOT NOW REFRAIN FROM PURUSING NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT IN THE EXPECTATION THAT IT MIGHT BE SUCCEEDED, AT SOME TIME, BY A GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL TAKE GREATER ACCOUNT OF OUR INTERESTS IN ANY NEW TREATY?

A. NO. WE HAVE CONCLUDED, ON OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE VARIOUS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FIGURES AND POLITICAL GROUPS IN PANAMA, THAT VIRTUALLY ANY FUTURE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA IS LIKELY TO TAKE JUST AS HARD OR HARDER LINE TOWARD OUR INTERESTS THAN THIS ONE, JUST AS THIS ONE IS HARDER THAN ITS PREDECESSORS. TIME IS MOVING ON, OUR EXISTING RELATIONSHIP WITH PANAMA GROWS MORE ANACHRONISTIC EVERY DAY, AND GOVERNMENTS OF ANY POLITICAL PERSUASION REFLECT THE TENOR OF THEIR TIMES. WE CANNOT EXPECT THAT ANY FUTURE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA WOULD ACCEPT THINGS WHICH THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT FEELS IT MUST REJECT.

7. DOES NOT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S VIOLATION OF ITS OWN CONSTITUTION INDICATE A BASIC DISRESPECT FOR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS? DOESN'T THIS MEAN THAT WE CANNOT SAFELY CONCLUDE A TREATY WITH THIS GOVERNMENT, AS IT WILL NOT ABIDE BY THAT TREATY?

A. A NEW CANAL TREATY, IF IT IS TO BE EFFECTIVE, MUST BE AN INTRICATE BALANCING OF THE INTERESTS OF BOTH PARTIES. IT MUST BE BROADLY ACCEPTABLE TO THE PEOPLE OF BOTH COUNTRIES, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE POLITICS OF OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS. IT MUST BE SO DRAWN THAT IT IS IN THE INTERESTS OF BOTH PARTIES TO ABIDE BY IT--BECAUSE, ULTIMATELY, THERE IS NO OTHER SURETY THAT THIS OR ANY OTHER INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT WILL CONTINUE TO BE OBSERVED. IF THE NEW TREATY MEETS THESE CRITERIA--AND WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF NEGOTIATING ONE WHICH DOES NOT--WE SEE NO GOOD REASON WHY PANAMA SHOULD WILFULLY VIOLATE IT, BECAUSE IT WOULD NOT BE IN PANAMA'S INTERESTS TO DO SO.
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